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CONTEXT MODELING IN A COGNITIVE MEMORY

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Daniel Joseph Lombardi

Abstract

This report is concerned with the derivation and description of a model used for structuring the "Rules of the Road" as a data base for a general question answering system. Related work and question-answering processes are also discussed.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this project, of which this report is a part, is to develop a general question-answering system. Unlike the previous work done in this area, this system will use natural English as an input language and it will not be dependent upon a pre-determined format for the phrasing of questions. Specifically, this paper deals with the problem of organizing a memory for such a system. The universe has been confined to the "Rules of the Road" to facilitate implementation of the data base.

In Chapter 2, previous work will be discussed in relation to the present model. This will include a brief description of the first model tried and the way it was used to answer questions.

In Chapter 3, the present model will be explained in detail and a few diagrams are given to show how the model is applied to the "Rules of the Road" data base.

In Chapter 4, question-answering schemes will be suggested and examples given.

II. PREVIOUS MODELS

1. Generally Related Models

Among the first to recognize the need for "a data representation that could contain general facts about the relations in the logical system as well as specific facts about the objects in the real problem domain" were Green and Raphael.¹ They developed a question-answering system, called QAl, that utilized such a memory organization. It was an improvement over the SIR system by Raphael² in that its list structure memory contained relational information to supplement the various kinds of facts.

This relational information was confined to the areas of part-whole relationships, set membership, set inclusion, spatial relationships and general statistics. This was due in part to the modified predicate calculus representation of information that was used. The subsequent evolution of their systems have proceeded in the direction of automatic theorem proving. This type of model, however, does not lend itself to the more general textual type of data base (e.g., the Rules of the Road) where the relational information needed is more diversified and isn't readily mapped into mathematical terms.

2. Specifically Related Models

The first attempt at a question-answering system using the "Rules of the Road" as a data base (i.e., the R2 system) was implemented by Jensen and Stahl.³ The organization of their "memory" model took the form of the "Rules of the Road" manual verbatim. Initial processing consisted of placing the manual on tape with the various sentences and title heads being numbered consecutively. The objective was to find a general strategy

technique that would retrieve statements from the data base that were relevant to a particular question.

The technique they used was called the maximal phrase relational strategy and consisted of a dictionary, a set of statements and a particular strategy. In brief, the maximal phrase index consisted of the patterns that occurred in the data base that were maximal. In other words, if pattern A was included in pattern B, then pattern A was removed from the index. The result of this technique, when applied to a particular question, was the retrieval of context from the data base that contained the same maximum phrase as was found in the question.

Although this process did not require a restructuring of the data base and had the extremely nice property of being data base independent, it had some rather implicit shortcomings. Its effectiveness as a statement retriever was limited by its inability to detect whether or not a statement was relevant to the specific issue in question. The fact that a maximal phrase matching had occurred simply was not a sufficient criteria for relevancy. Other problems, such as how to deal with pluralization also presented themselves.

In short, although the system had limited success as an efficient statement-retriever, it, nevertheless, provided very valuable insight into the nature of the problems that must be resolved and also into the nature of the maximal phrase technique and the extent of its usefulness.

III. A NEW MODEL

1. Derivation

The philosophy behind modeling the prescribed data base in the following fashion is to construct a comprehensive and coherent structure that relates the fundamental topics of "Rules of the Road" in such a manner as to make them readily accessible to an "uninformed" individual. The system, at present, does not contain any logical deductive ability and consequently everything involved in the model is explicitly stated whether it be an object, an action, or a relation.

Conceptually, the data representation is similar to the one suggested by Green and Raphael.¹ However, in order to increase the comprehensive nature of the model, it was necessary to develop a structure that was not solely dependent on the postulates of predicate calculus. In fact, a completely linguistic approach was used which effectively bypassed the rather stringent limitations imposed by the foregoing mathematical treatment. This approach cannot be used without some compromise, but it did lead to a model with a broad capability that is especially applicable to coherent textual material.

Basically, the model contains three types of information. The first type is of a syntactic nature, and is synonymous with the accepted syntactical formulation of the English language. Words and groups of words are classed as static, dynamic and/or as modifiers. These three classes are represented in the model as static, dynamic and/or modification nodes respectively. The properties of the word or phrase that determine which type of node (i.e., class) it will occupy are analogous to standard English

syntactical properties (i.e., noun, verb, adjective, etc.) and will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

The second type of information present in the model is of a semantic nature. This information takes the form of channels in the model and is used in conjunction with pointers to show explicitly the physical relationships between the nodes. It was found that including this type of information in the model almost completely eliminates the relevancy problem encountered by Jensen and Stahl.³

Finally, the model contains information in the form of contextual data. This data is expressed with the aid of chosen passages from the "Rules of the Road" manual that are referenced according to the nature of their content in relation to specific static, dynamic and modification nodes.

In view of the amount of material to be covered and the practical constraints imposed by implementation, the model structure itself is based on a comprehensive yet fairly simple organizational procedure. The problem of including all the fundamental topics involved was a relatively simple one. However, if each of these topics is thought of in regard to its interaction with all the conceivably related actions, the number and complexity of these interactions soon becomes prohibitive and the result is an extremely redundant and complicated model. This problem was finally resolved by the introduction of the "data cell" concept. Basically, the data cell is an independent structure within the framework of the model. It is designed to take advantage of the redundancy occurring among actions that refer to individual fundamental topics. The idea is to include in a particular data cell only those fundamental topic constituents that are

members of the same set. All the members of this set, or subset, then share the same list of actions included in that data cell. The method is exemplified in Figs. 1-4 and is discussed thoroughly in the following two sections.

2. Outline of Model Structure


I. Data Cell

A. Nodes


1. Static Nodes

a. Major

- (1) Independent: These nodes contain an object, a person, or a thing.

(i.e., )

- (2) Dependent: These nodes refer to a specific independent major static node or to another dependent major static node. They contain words that are types of the object, person, or thing contained in the independent major static node and in many cases are analogous to adjectives.

(i.e., )

- b. Minor Dependent: These nodes contain a definition, an explanation, or general data and refer to a specific major node.

(i.e., )

2. Dynamic Nodes

- a. Major: These nodes contain an action word, and depending on the nature of the major independent static nodes that they refer to, either specify something that can be done to a major static node or something that can be done by a major static node.

(i.e.,

)

- b. Minor: These nodes contain the explanation of the performance of some action, or some other general data concerning an action.

(i.e.,

)

B. Relational Data Channels

1. Operates on a static node and maps into a static node (abbr. nSS where n = 1,2,...10;)
2. Operates on a static node and maps into a dynamic node (abbr. nSD where n = 1)
3. Operates on a dynamic node and maps into a static node (abbr. nDS where n = 1,2,...13)
4. Operates on a dynamic node and maps into a dynamic node (abbr. nDD where n = 1,2,...10)

II. Modifiers

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| A. adjectives and adverbs (i.e., | <table border="1" data-bbox="893 1432 1060 1507" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;">safe
1a</table> | , | <table border="1" data-bbox="1193 1432 1377 1507" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;">right
2a</table> |) |
| B. conditions | (i.e., <table border="1" data-bbox="893 1533 1060 1608" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;">rain
1b</table> | , | <table border="1" data-bbox="1193 1533 1377 1608" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;">accident
4b</table> |) |
| C. locations | (i.e., <table border="1" data-bbox="893 1633 1060 1709" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;">two-way
street
1c</table> | , | <table border="1" data-bbox="1193 1633 1377 1709" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;">hill
4c</table> |) |

3. Description and Examples

The foregoing outline shows the two basic parts of the model structure, the Data Cell and the Modifiers with their respective constituents. The model itself is made up of a number of these Data Cells and a list of Modifiers. Each Data Cell is completely independent of the others, therefore permitting certain aspects of the data base to be completely modeled without having to model the data base as a whole in order to cross reference. At present, four data cells have been either fully or partially completed. They are shown in Figs. 1-4. Approximately 10-12 will be needed to completely model "Rules of the Road", but the four shown in this report cover a majority of the information needed. Additional data cells should include Major Independent Static Cells such as: (5) driver, person, pedestrian; (6) accident; (7) traffic law; and (8) alcohol. An example of some of the words to be included as dynamic nodes in data cell (5) would be: follow, yield, pass, weave, use, signal, speed, drive, learn, and travel.

As can be seen from the outline, each data cell consists of two types of nodes: static and dynamic. The terms noun and verb have purposely been omitted since they are not general enough to be used per se. Noun phrase and verb phrase are more closely related but still are not quite general enough.

All the Major Static Nodes in one data cell are related by the fact that the contents of each node in the list of Major Dynamic Nodes can refer to any Major Static Independent or Dependent node within that particular cell. This is the property that defines the boundary conditions for admitting a static constituent to a particular cell. Furthermore,

it was found that many of these static and dynamic nodes contained words that have one or more synonyms that are used with equal fluency. This was also found to be the case with the list of modifiers. In order to save space and to simplify the diagrams as much as possible, all the nodes containing words with synonyms have been marked with an asterisk (*) and these synonyms are listed in a dictionary found in the Appendix.

The Relational Data Channels (RDC) are used to relate all the nodes in one cell. This relationship, however, is unidirectional and only goes from major to major or major to minor node. This means that a minor node is never referenced directly. It can only be pointed to by a major node, or combination thereof, using a RDC and the addresses of the modifiers (if any). This will be explained in detail later in the report.

The following four sets contain explicitly the individual components of each type of RDC listed in the outline. These RDC's, although applied to the "Rules of the Road" in this case, are of a very general nature and are, to a great degree, data base independent. No claim is made as to whether or not these relationships are all necessary or sufficient, but a great deal of care has been taken to phrase them in such a way as to eliminate redundancy while retaining flexibility. Also, the majority of them are used in one of the four data cells shown in Figs. 1-4.

Set #1. Operates on a Static Node and maps into a Static Node. (abbr. nSS where $n = 1, 2, \dots, 10$)

1. specifies one type of an existing class of objects.
2. specifies the definition or the meaning of an object.

3. specifies the parts of an object.
4. specifies a possible location of an object.
5. specifies the cost or fee of an object.
6. specifies the purpose of an object.
7. specifies how the knowledge of a given object is conveyed.
8. specifies the shape of an object.
9. specifies the color of an object.
10. specifies the number of objects required.

Set #2. Operates on a Static Node and maps into a Dynamic Node. (abbr. nSN where $n = 1$)

1. specifies an action that is implied or associated with an object.

Set #3. Operates on a Dynamic Node and maps into a Static Node. (abbr. nDS where $n = 1, 2, \dots, 13$)

1. specifies an object that is implied or associated with an action.
2. specifies a location of an action.
3. specifies who must perform an action.
4. specifies who may perform an action.
5. specifies the purpose of an action
6. specifies static condition(s) that must exist so that the action referred to can take place.
7. specifies a period of time relevant to an action.
8. specifies who is influenced or effected by an action.
9. specifies whether or not an action is legal, (i.e., permitted, prohibited, etc.)
10. specifies the definition of an action.
11. specifies static conditions that make an action necessary.

12. specifies static conditions whose nature (i.e., good, bad, etc.) determines the degree of proficiency of an action (i.e., how fast, how well, etc.).
13. specifies the distance from an object or from another action, that an action must take place.

Set #4. Operates on a Dynamic Node and maps into a Dynamic Node. (abbr. nDD where $n = 1, 2, \dots, 10$)

1. specifies action that is implied or associated with an action.
2. specifies active conditions that must be met before a certain type of action can take place.
3. specifies the purpose of an action.
4. specifies how to perform or accomplish an action.
5. specifies the consequences of an action. (i.e., penalty, reward, etc.)
6. specifies the consequences of an action not performed or performed inadequately.
7. specifies active conditions that make an action necessary.
8. specifies action that should or must be taken under given active conditions.
9. specifies action that may be taken under given active conditions.
10. specifies active conditions that cause an action to take place.

Each of the four sets of RDC's above is made up of a number of explicitly stated relationships that performs the desired mapping operation. These are abbreviated by showing which set the operation belongs to and exactly which one it is. For example, 3DS is the notation used for "specifies who must perform an action," since it is the third member of the dynamic to static (i.e., DS) operator set. This particular RDC would point to a minor static node that would supply the required information.

For example, data cell #2 in Fig. 2 deals with the "driver's license" in one of its Major Independent Static Nodes. In the list of many dynamic nodes that could conceivably relate to the "driver's license" is the one that contains the action word "obtain". Now the RDC, specifically 3DS, can be used to point the way to "who should perform this action" of "obtaining a driver's license." This is accomplished by writing down the relationship, 3DS, and by following it with the address of the Major Independent Static Node that it specifically refers to (i.e., 3DS-1, where 1 is the required address).

This RDC then points to a Minor Static Node that contains the required information. In this case the information is "Almost everyone who wishes to operate a motor vehicle on the streets and highways of Illinois." This is also put into notation by merely specifying the page, paragraph and sentence number from the "Rules of the Road" manual. The above information is found at 4.1 (i.e., page 4, paragraph 1). Furthermore, this same RDC can be used to supply information about a more specific type of drivers' license simply by extending the address to include that of one or more Major Dependent Static Nodes as well. For example, the RDC "4DD" is concerned with "specifying how an action is accomplished." Supposing we were interested in this relation in regard to "obtaining a duplicate license"; then we would look for the RDC identified by the notation 4DD-1e (where "e" is the address of the Major Dependent Static Node containing the word duplicate). This would lead us to the information 9.2b, which reads "by making application therefore and paying the required fee." Also, if a specific address is not given for a

Major Dependent Static Node, then the RDC and the resulting information is assumed to be true for all the Major Dependent Static Nodes of the particular Major Independent Static Node addressed. Furthermore, if a specific address is not given for a Major Independent Static Node, then the information resulting from that particular RDC is assumed to be true for all the Major Independent Static Nodes in the given data cell. An example of this can be seen in data cell #3 in Fig. 3. The RDC "3DD" which "specifies the purpose of an action" refers to the dynamic node containing the word "obey" and points to the Minor Static Node containing the information found on page 27, paragraph 1. This information pertains to the purpose of obeying signals, signs, and markings. These are the words contained in the three Major Independent Static Nodes of the data cell. Therefore, the information in 27.1 is referenced simply using the RDC "3DD" and no additional addresses are necessary. Further details and examples of this set inclusive type of addressing and referencing will be given at the end of this chapter and in Chapter IV.

Before explaining the use of the Modifiers in the model, some other useful notational features of the RDC will be pointed out. Occasionally it is necessary to refer to information that is related to a given major node in more than one way. For instance, a type of red sign is a STOP sign, type being denoted by 1SS, however the meaning of a red sign is to STOP, meaning (or definition) being denoted by 2SS. When a case like this arises, both notations are used on the respective RDC. This procedure is more concise than referencing the same information by two different channels.

The other feature that is used occasionally is that of complementing or negating the RDC. For example, the RDC '8DS' "specifies who is influenced or affected by an action." In data cell #2, shown in Fig. #2, 8DS-1 refers to 'who needs a drivers license' while $\overline{8DS}$ -1 refers to who doesn't need a drivers licence (i.e., "people who are not influenced or affected by the need for a drivers license"). Before continuing, it should be noted that the features mentioned above, like the introduction of the synonym dictionary, are intended to simplify the diagrams as much as possible. Whether or not it is feasible and/or practical to include them in the actual implementation is not yet apparent. Nevertheless, the system can be implemented without them by increasing the number of nodes, pointers and RDC's.

The second part of the model is made up of the list of Modifiers. As seen in the outline the first type of Modifiers used are adjectives and adverbs and consist of words like: 'safe', 'right', 'drunk', etc. Examples of the second type, locations, are: 'one-way street', 'sidewalk', 'hill', etc. Finally, the third type, conditions, contains words such as: 'snow', 'rain', 'fog', 'accident', etc. One or more of these three types of modifiers are at the disposal of every data cell and the entire list of dynamic nodes within each data cell. When it is necessary to reference a modifier on a RDC, it is simply necessary to state the address of that particular modifier after the address of the major static node. The modifiers are necessary because some relationships only exist under specific conditions, or at specific locations or only involve specific types of action.

For example, in data cell #4, shown in Fig. #4, information is given about "how to turn left onto a two-way street." The RDC and the corresponding addresses are, 4DD-3alc, where 3a and lc are the addresses of the modifiers "left" and "two-way street" respectively as shown in Fig. 5. Note that in this case there is no address given that refers to the Major Independent Static Node "vehicle." This is because of the fact that there is only one Major Independent Static Node in this particular data cell, and when no Major Dependent Static Node must be cited for a relation to hold, there can be no doubt which node the RDC is referring to. It is important to recognize that leaving the word "vehicle" out of the phrase "how to turn (a vehicle) left onto a two-way street" does not create any ambiguity. There is an a posteriori assumption involved that automatically foregoes the necessity of placing the word "vehicle" in the phrase. It is for this reason that the data cell only has one Major Independent Static Node in the first place. It is only when a relation applies only to a specific type of vehicle (i.e., a Major Dependent Static Node) that it becomes necessary to include the address of this static node with that of the RDC and the modifiers. This address function can be extended to a data cell containing more than one Major Independent Static Node and can be stated in the following way: Whenever a particular RDC, with or without the addresses of any circumscribing modifiers, holds for all the Major Independent Static Nodes in a data cell, it is not necessary to give the addresses of these nodes.

The next chapter gives further examples of this function and shows why it is important, along with how RDC's and addresses can be arrived at given a question.

IV. QUESTION ANSWERING IN THE MODEL

Naturally, this model was designed primarily for use in the cognitive memory of the R2 question-answering system. In light of this fact, it becomes necessary to consider the question-answering properties of this model in detail and to give examples of the question analysis and search procedure that facilitates the most effective use of this model in a question-answering system.

Basically, the question answering procedure can be divided up into the following three phases: the syntactic analysis (or parsing of the question), the semantic analysis or interpretation, and the retrieval or search procedure. The first two phases of this procedure deal with the formulation of a set of information from the given question. The third phase then uses this set of information as a guide and a reference in searching the model for the correct answer. For example, the question "Where do you obtain a driver's license?" contains the following set of information: 2DS-1, where 2DS is the RDC and 1 is the address of the Major Static Independent Node containing the word "driver's license". Obtaining the address of the "driver's license" node is simply a matter of searching all the Major Static Nodes for the word "driver's license" after the appropriate parsing algorithm has been applied. However, the problem of deducing the appropriate RDC from the parsed question is a considerable one. This problem of carrying out semantic interpretation procedures rather than merely matching a structure in the data base is the same one that Woods⁴ was confronted with. In solving the problem, Woods developed a "semantic interpreter" that bridged the gap between

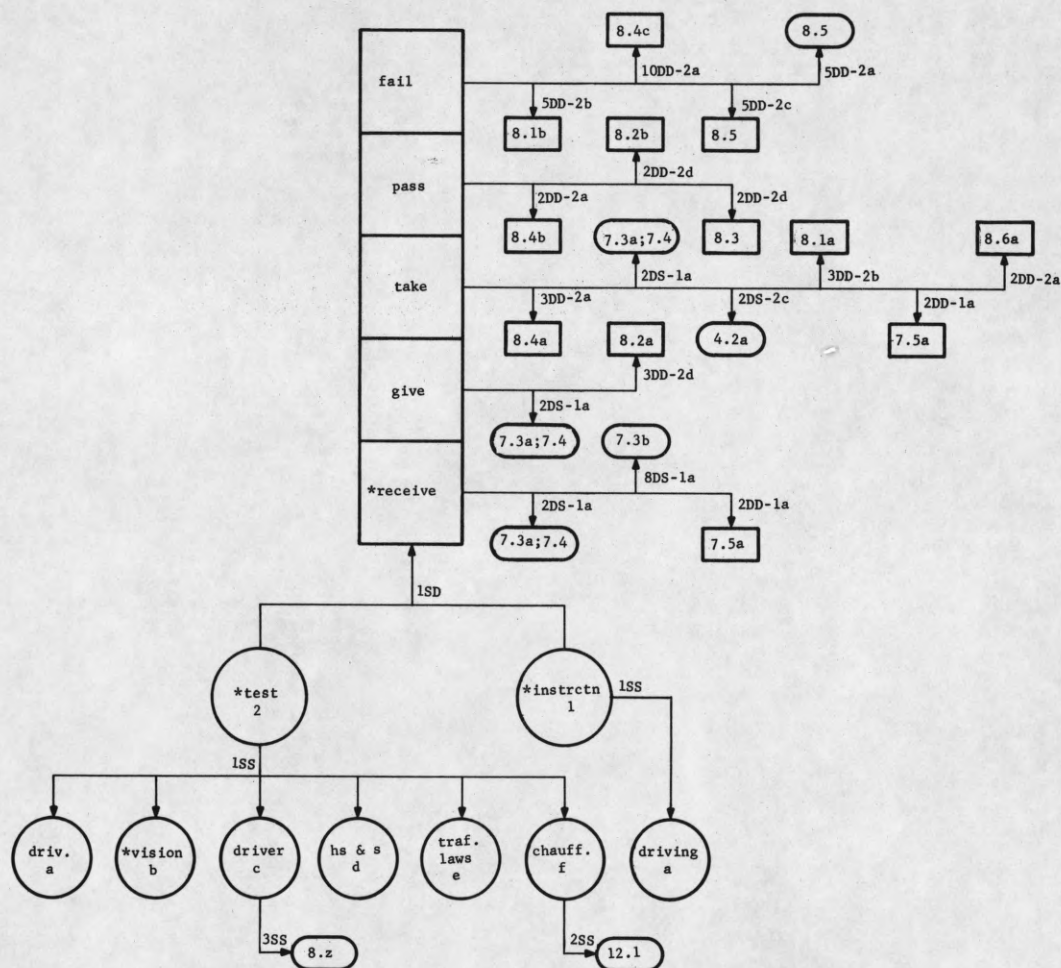
the parsed question and his "semantic primitives" and their respective subroutines. These semantic primitives are analogous to the RDC's discussed in this model and, consequently, with some adaptation and extension, this "semantic interpreter" can be implemented within the present framework. Once the interpretation is complete, and the required set of information is deduced from the question, the search procedure can be executed. Referring back to the sample question "Where do you obtain a driver's license?", the "semantic interpreter" will yield the RDC 2DS and the parser will identify the Major Independent Static Node to be located, namely the one containing the word "driver's license". The most efficient way to perform this search would be to use an associative technique and to scan all the nodes simultaneously. In any case, once this node (or block as it is referred to in linked list computer storage terminology) is located, its address will be stored and the pointers within the block will be referenced. One pointer will contain the addresses of all the various types of "driver's licenses" (see Fig. 2) and the other pointer will contain the address of all the dynamic nodes (or blocks) in that particular data cell (i.e., data cell #2). If a particular type of "driver's license" is called for, such as a "duplicate license" then the Major Dependent Static Nodes are scanned for the word "duplicate" and its address is recorded. In the example given this does not occur, so now the list of dynamic nodes is scanned for the word "obtain". This node (or block) has fields containing the information shown in the channel emitting from the block "obtain" in Fig. 2. This information, such as 2DS-1, 6DS-1, 2DS-2, etc., is also supplemented with pointers.

Now it is necessary to find the best match between the set of information obtained from the question and the information stored in the aforementioned block. The best match can be defined in the following way: Let A be the set of information obtained from the question and B be the set of stored information, then the largest B such that $B \subseteq A$ defines the best possible match. Once this match has been made, the specific information relating to it (i.e., 4.2a, 5.12, 7.5b, etc.) will be pointed to and selected. For example, the question given previously was said to yield the following set of information: 2DS-1. Since the "obtain" block contains an identical set of information, the best match in this case is obvious and the information accessed would be 4.2a. However, supposing the question had been, "How do you park a car on the downward slope of a hill?". After the appropriate parsing has been carried out and the addresses of the Major Independent Static Node and the appropriate Modifiers stored, the question yields the following set of information as can be seen from Fig. 4 and Fig. 5: 4DD-1a-7b4c. Now searching the block "park" for the best match using the criterion specified earlier, the set of information 4DD(8DD)-4c is chosen. The respective pointer is to 67.1b which reads, "If you park on a hill you must turn the front wheels to the curb. Then you must set the emergency or parking brake." If we consider the same question phrased a little differently the reason for the set inclusive type addressing mentioned earlier becomes obvious. Supposing the question had been, "How do you park on the downward slope of a hill?". This is, in fact, a more likely phrasing of the question. The set of information obtained from this question would be 4DD-4c7b. The best

possible match is still 4DD-4c, but if the address of the node "vehicle" had been included in the stored set of information (i.e., 4DD-1-4c), then no match would be possible under the specified criterion since the stored information would contain an address not appearing in the set obtained from the question (i.e., 4DD-4c7b). Therefore, the set of information stored in the memory must correspond to the shortest possible set of information an "unambiguous" question can have.

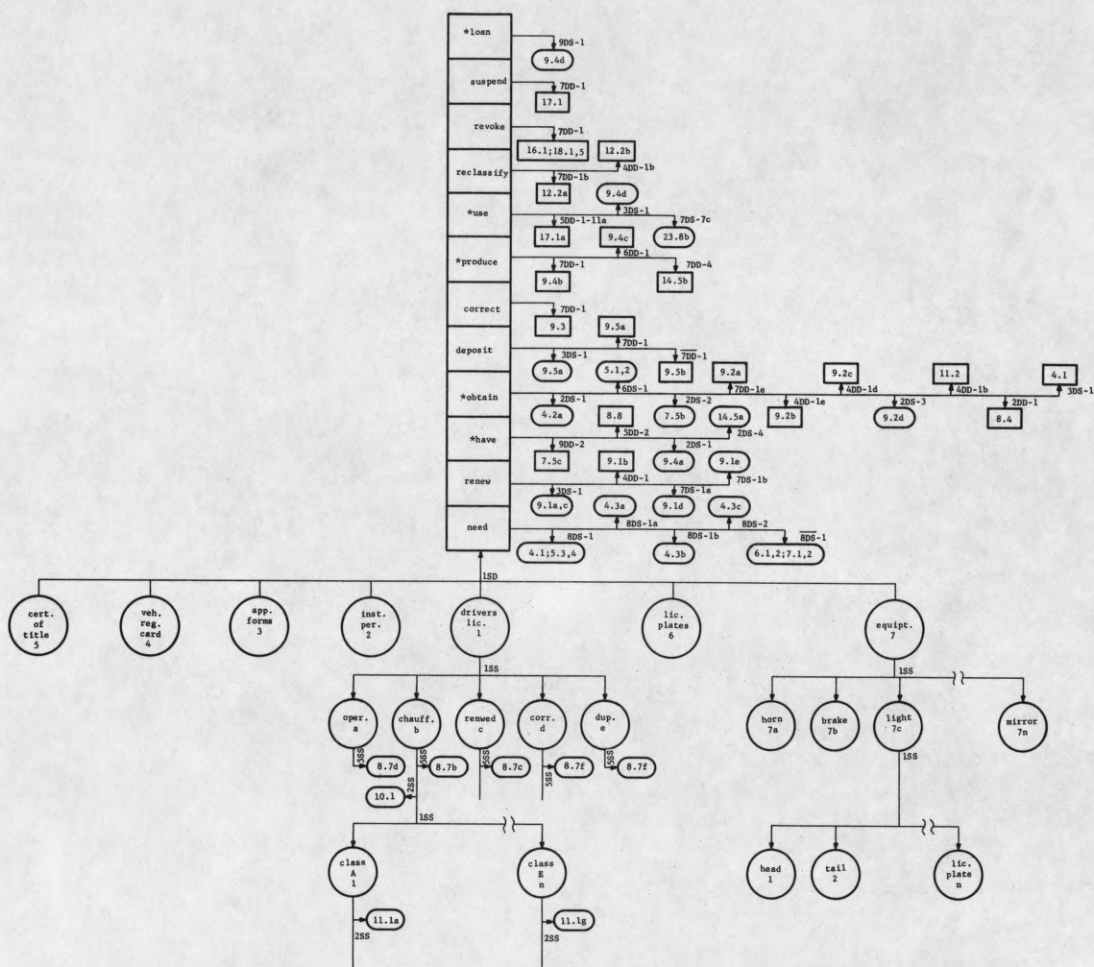
As one final example, consider the question, "What does a triangular sign mean?". Using a suitable parsing algorithm in conjunction with Woods interpreter will yield the RDC 2ss (i.e., specifies the definition or the meaning of an object) and the Major Independent Static Node "sign". In this case, however, the adjective "triangular" is also noted and the Major Dependent Static Nodes relating to the node "sign" are searched since "triangular" is a type of sign. Now since all the parameters have been specified and there is no Dynamic Node to be referenced, once the node containing the word "triangular" is located, its fields are scanned for the information 2SS and its respective pointer. As a consequence, the passage 28.2c is selected and it reads "Yield the Right-of-Way".

Unfortunately, at this time it is not possible to give all the details pertinent to the actual implementation of this system. However, the somewhat heuristic methods outlined here define a reasonable set of guidelines for the design of the actual algorithms needed for implementation.



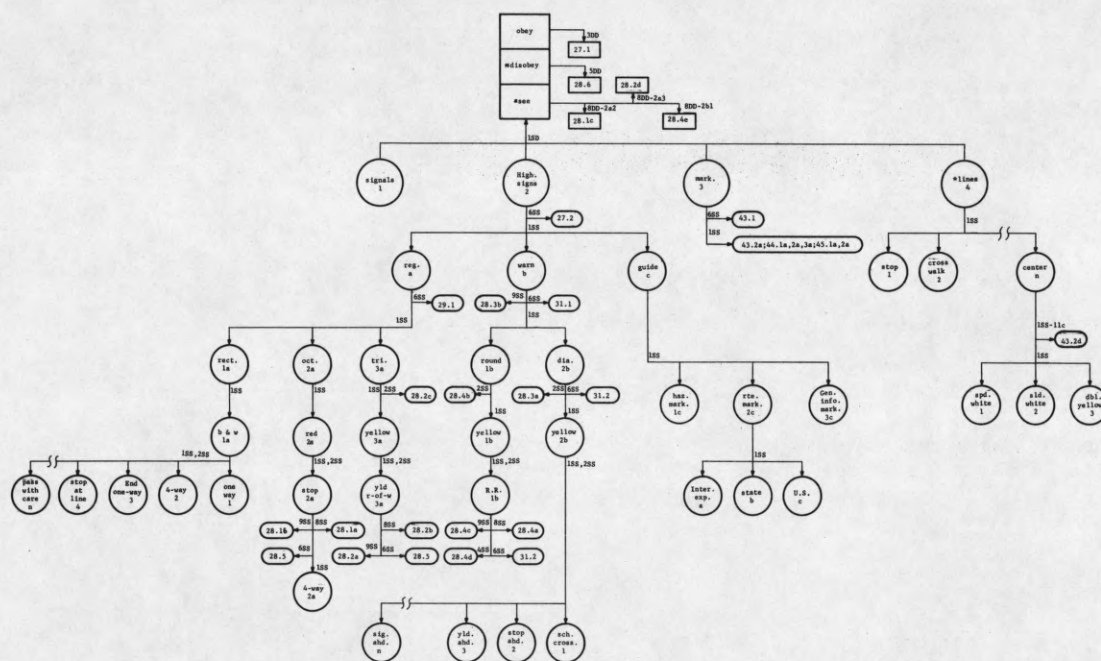
*synonyms (see Appendix)

Figure 1. Data Cell #1



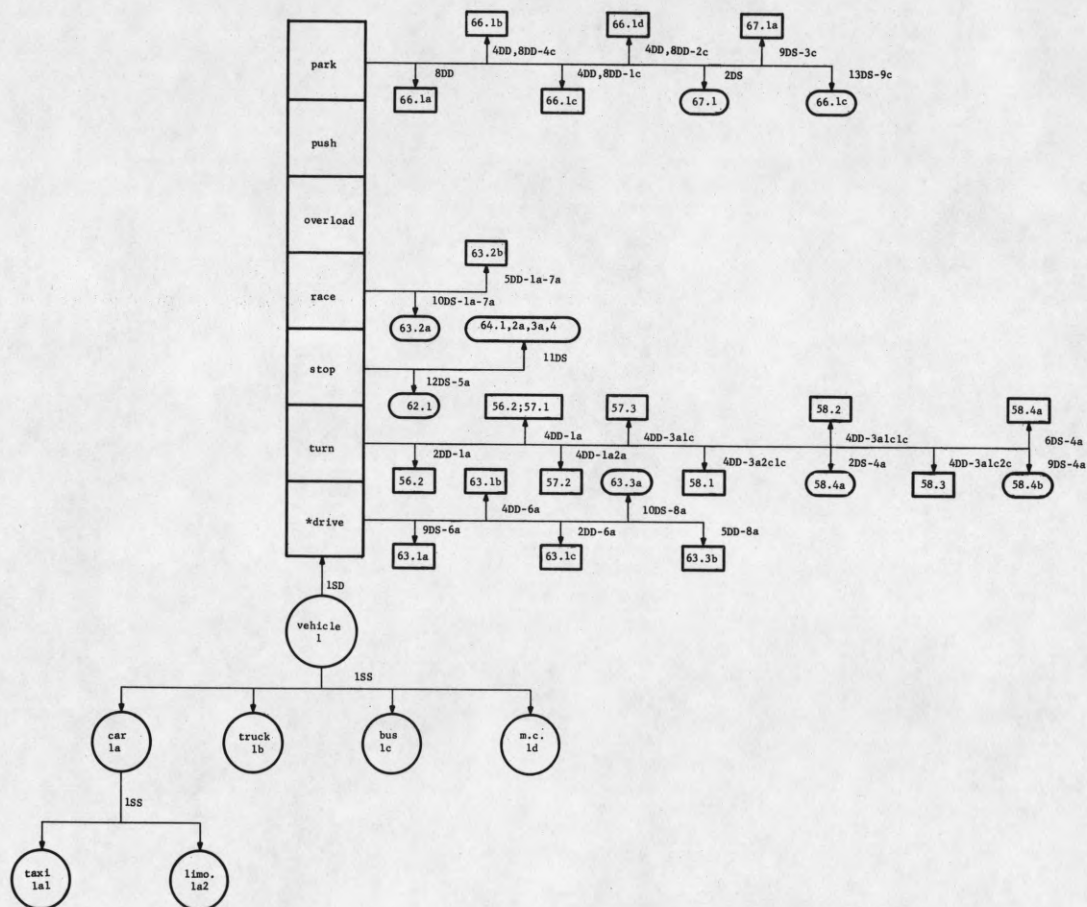
*synonyms (see Appendix)

Figure 2. Data Cell #2



*synonyms (see Appendix)

Figure 3. Data Cell #3



*synonyms (see Appendix)

Figure 4. Data Cell #4

ADJECTIVES & ADVERBS		CONDITIONS	LOCATIONS	
*safe 1a	fradulent 11a	rain 1b	two-way street 1c	4-lane highway 11c
right 2a	double 12a	snow 2b	one-way street 2c	expressway 12c
left 3a	4-way 13a	fog 3b	sidewalk 3c	ramp 130
U 4a		accident 4b	hill 4c	
*quick 5a		another driver 5b	crosswalk 5c	
*drunk 6a		up ahead 6b	intersection 6c	
drag 7a		dnward slope 7b	safety zone 7c	
*reckless 8a			R.R. crossing 8c	
*prohibit 9a			curb 9c	
*legal 10a			fire hydrant 10c	

*synonyms (see Appendix)

Figure 5. Modifiers

APPENDIX

Synonym Dictionary

allowed: legal
approach: see
arrive at: see
be at: see
be equipped with: have
carry: have
come to: see
display: produce
eye: vision
examination: test
fast: quick
get: receive, obtain
ignore: disobey
illegal: prohibit
intoxicated: drunk
lessons: instruction
let another person use
lose: revoke
negligent: reckless
not allowed: prohibit
not permitted: prohibit
not prohibited: permitted

APPENDIX (continued)

operate a motor vehicle: drive

permit another person to use: loan

permitted: legal

possess: have

proper: safe

run through: disobey

show: produce

square: rectangular

stripes: lines

turn on: use

unlawful: fraudulent

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